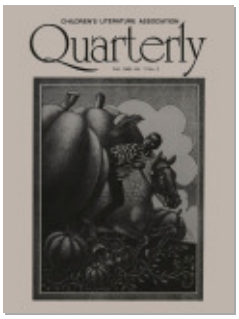
Literary Uses of Traditional Themes: From "Cinderella" to *The Girl Who Sat by the Ashes* and *The Glass Slipper*



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Literary Uses of Traditional Themes: From "Cinderella" to *The Girl Who Sat by the Ashes* and *The Glass Slipper*

by Ellin Greene

"The study of folklore in literature entails at least two distinct methodological steps," writes folklorist Alan Dundes: "identification and interpretation" (230). Dundes criticizes folklorists for stopping at identification, and literary scholars for failing to identify accurately and fully the folkloristic element or form in a given literary text. Chiding literary scholars for their lack of folklore scholarship, Dundes says, "Without considering folkloristic sources for literature, would-be critics are

deprived of an absolutely essential means of seeing how poets transform the common clay of folk imagination into a literary masterpiece" (231).

This essay is an attempt to identify the folkloristic sources in two modern fantasies for children based on popular folktale, and to indicate how folktale motifs have been used in conscious works of art. Stith Thompson's second revision of Antti Aarne's *The Types of the Folktale*, FF Communications 184 (Helsinki 1961) and Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955-58) have been used to identify the folkloristic sources. The tale type and motif number are indicated in parentheses within the text, as appropriate.

Of all known folktales, "Cinderella" probably has the most widely scattered versions. The earliest known comes from ninth-century China (see Waley 226-38 and Jameson 71-97). Later versions represent a geographical spread from Western Europe to Iceland, North America, and Africa. The meaning of the tale has been argued by scholars for more than a century, but no consensus has been reached; nor is that likely, for the meaning changes to meet the needs of the time and of the individual listeners. On the surface, Cinderella is the story of a young woman who feels mistreated, unloved and unappreciated. Through some form of magical help (the spirit of her dead mother, a supernatural being, friendly animals, birds, or fishes) the heroine triumphs over her oppressors and receives her heart's desire. Early folklorists considered the tale a nature-myth about Spring or Dawn. Modern scholars focus on the psychological rather than the mythological and view the story as a problem of semblance and reality.

The two works I want to consider are *The Glass Slipper*, by Eleanor Farjeon and *The Girl Who Sat by the Ashes*, by Padraic Colum. Eleanor Farjeon (1881-1965) and Padraic Colum (1881-1972) were British contemporaries. Both were poets, both wrote for adults and children, both were recognized by the children's book world, and both received the Regina Medal, given by the Catholic Library Association "to an individual whose lifetime dedication to children's literature exemplifies the words of Walter de la Mare, 'Only the rarest kind of best in anything can be good enough for the young.'"

Farjeon's novel *The Glass Slipper* was originally written as a play, which was produced in London in 1944 and again in 1945; she rewrote it as a novel for children ten years later. *The Glass Slipper* is based on the popular seventeenth-century Perrault version of "Cinderella" (Type 510A) which was based on the oral tradition but embellished by Perrault's inventions—a pumpkin transformed into a carriage (F861.4.3), a rat into a coachman (D315.1 Transformation: rat to person), lizards into footmen (D397 Transformation: lizard to person), mice into horses (D411.6.1 Transformation: mouse to horse)—and a glass slipper. Farjeon's choice of Perrault's version, with its theme of wish-fulfillment and its transformation of common objects, is peculiarly suited to her frequent use of the daydream as a literary device and her philosophy of the oneness of dream and reality (see Greene 61-70). In both Perrault and Farjeon the use of realistic objects ground the wishful daydreaming.

Farjeon's Ella (Cinderella) is sixteen years old. She is a good girl—simple, unpretentious, a day-dreamer. Her stepsisters are vain and thoughtless, but not cruel. Araminta is "peevish, sly, thin and scratchy"; Arethusa is "stupid, greedy, fat, and flouncy." They are made to appear immature and silly—fancily dressed, they suck lollipops on their way to the ball. Ella's father is henpecked. He seems to be suffering from presenile dementia—"my poor mind, my poor mind!" he laments, as he tries to remember the details of the ball to relate to his daughter. Ella's stepmother is cruel (S31). She threatens to smash Ella's only picture of her mother and locks Ella in her cupboard bed (Ella lives in the kitchen and sleeps in a narrow box bed in the wall with a shutter that can be pulled across the bed and locked). Though Ella is a day-dreamer and a wishful thinker, she has spunk. She defies her stepmother, refusing to tear up her invitation to the ball until she is coerced by her stepmother's threat to destroy the precious portrait.

Ella is sent to gather sticks for the fire (possibly borrowed from the Russian version in which Vasilisa is sent to get fire from Baba Yaga). In the woods Ella feeds her roll of bread to the hungry birds (B450 Helpful birds) while pretending that the roll is "a slice of game pie and four peaches." An old crone, bent double beneath a faggot of brushwood, appears and Ella carries the faggots for her. The old crone reveals she is a magical being who can change her appearance from crone to bird at will. The old crone (F311.1 Fairy Godmother) disappears, leaving Ella the faggots and among them, a game pie and four peaches.

Like Ella, the Prince is a wishful thinker. He is waiting for his "true" bride. His constant companion is the Zany, a character Farjeon added to the folktale. The Prince's great-great grandmother was a water nymph, suggesting supernatural origins, thereby making the Prince a suitable mate for Cinderella, who is also close to supernatural powers. (Was Farjeon aware of the version, "The Young Countess and the Water-Nymph"? See Cox 318-321).

After her stepmother and stepsisters leave for the ball, Ella daydreams there is a mouse ball. At ten o'clock as the real ball begins at the palace, a fairy steps out of the grandfather clock in Ella's kitchen. It is the old crone, the fairy godmother. The fairy summons her spirits and turns Ella into the "Princess from Nowhere." After turning a pumpkin into a coach, mice into horses, a rat into a coachman, and lizards into footmen, she leaves a pair of glass slippers in the grandfather clock for Ella. Ella doesn't take the initiative, as Cinderella does in the Perrault version when she says, "Let me see if there isn't a rat in the rat-trap. We could make a coachman out of that." (56). The metamorphoses are all accomplished with the wave of the fairy's magic wishing-wand (D1470.1.24) and follow Perrault's text. But in Perrault the touch of reality still exists: for example, the horses are mouse gray. In the Farjeon version, the horses are "milk-white with silver manes and tails."

At the ball the Prince refuses to dance, because none of the ladies please him. Then the Princess from Nowhere arrives. Ella and the Prince are enamoured of each other at first sight. "*She* is here," murmurs the Prince. He kisses Ella's hand and Ella, enchanted, asks him to kiss it again. Ella dances with the Prince. Then she organizes a game of

hide-and-seek which Farjeon uses as a device to allow Ella to escape as the clock strikes midnight, the hour when the magic ends (C761.3 Tabu: staying too long at ball). Ella loses her glass slipper in her flight from the ball (R221) and the Zany finds it. (In Farjeon's version there is only one ball, in Perrault there are two.) The King's herald announces that all the young ladies in the kingdom are to try on the glass slipper (H36.1 Slipper test). The kitchen things attack the stepmother when she tries to keep Ella out-of-sight. She defeats them and locks Ella in her box bed so that she will not be able to try on the slipper. Ella's fairy godmother appears, restores the kitchen things, and locks the stepmother in the box bed. The stepsisters are caught at cheating—Araminta uses a shoehorn and Arethusa soaps her heel in a vain attempt to fit the slipper. But Farjeon's version is not so gruesome as the Grimm's version in which the stepsisters cut off part of a heel and toe to try to fit the slipper (K1911.3.3.1 False bride's mutilated feet).

The fairy godmother materializes Ella. The Prince puts the slipper on her foot (H36.1), recognizes his true bride, kisses Ella's grubby hand, and commands everyone present to kiss her hand. Ella forgives her stepsisters, but there is no mention of finding husbands for them as in the Perrault version. There is a final touch of magic when the fairy godmother has the Zany show the Prince (and all present) the Kingdom of Nowhere. The old crone vanishes, the Palace comes back to earth, everything returns to normal except Ella and the Prince, for they "had left a part of themselves in Nowhere, where wishes come true." Farjeon's version is perfect wish-fulfillment: for those who retain the imaginative life of the child, dream and reality are one.

Colum's reworking of "Cinderella," *The Girl Who Sat by the Ashes*, was published in 1919 and reissued with new illustrations in 1968. Colum borrows folkloristic elements from various versions of "Cinderella" (Type 510) to create an entirely new version. Colum's Cinderella is called by various names. Her stepmother and stepsisters call her "Girl-go-with-the-Goats," but she calls herself "Maid-Alone." In the opening chapter the reader is introduced to the Old Woman in the Cloak of Crow-Feathers (F311.1 Fairy Godmother). The Old Woman appears to the two stepsisters, Berry-bright and Buttercup, and asks them "to put the griddle on the fire and knead and bake a cake for me." The stepsisters refuse, revealing their vanity in their refusal. They have been washing their hands in new milk to make them as white as blossoms when the Prince chooses a wife. Maid-Alone obliges the Old Woman and helps her over the stepping stones. The Old Woman places a shining star on Maid-Alone's forehead (Q. Rewards and Punishments, H71.1 Star on forehead as sign of royalty).

The King's son comes along on his white jennet and asks each of the stepsisters for berries from their garden. Each sister is prevented from picking the berries by a flock of birds who attack them. Only Maid-Alone can gather berries for the King's son (Type 511 One-Eye, Two Eyes, Three Eyes, D1461 Magic tree furnishes treasures). Two starlings alight on her shoulders and sing to her as she picks the berries. The starlings are equivalent to the doves in the Grimm version and probably are a metamorphic form of the deceased mother (B313.1 Helpful animal reincarnation of parent). Maid-Alone gathers the berries in an old shoe as she has no other vessel. (Note that Colum introduces the shoe motif early in the story). The King's son rudely strikes Maid-Alone on the arm with the shoe and pushes her against the garden ditch.

When the stepmother returns home her daughters greet her with ingratiating words. Maid-Alone's greeting is "I am more pleased to see you than if you had brought salt to the house when it was lacking it" (H592.1, Type 923 Love like Salt). The stepmother is incensed by what she considers an unfitting welcome, and, seeing the star on Maid-Alone's forehead, makes her cover it with ashes and drives her out of the house to live in the goat shed. The helpful birds (B450) sing to her to lessen her loneliness.

The next morning the stepmother sends Maid-Alone to the Forge in the Forest for embers to relight the fire she and her daughters have let go out (see the Russian version of "Cinderella," "Vasilisa the Beautiful"). At first this experience is not frightening. The two dwarfs at the Forge give Maid-Alone two pieces of glowing wood from their fire. On the way home she comes upon the King's son trying to make a fire in the forest. She uses her embers to build a fire for him, but he, in return, refuses to give her more than one ember. When the ember goes out she tries to find her way back to the Forge in the Forest, loses her way in the dark, and meets a giant who threatens to lock her up with the other twenty-nine maidens he has caught (possibly a reference to Bluebeard?). But again the two starlings come to her rescue (B450). They make a loud splashing noise in the water basin, the giant thinks she is washing herself, and she escapes. She overhears two magpies (B216 Knowledge of animal language), talking about the Woman of a Thousand Years (alias the Old Woman in the Cloak of Crow-feathers) and seeks shelter with her. There she meets Gruagach, "Trouble-the-House," a creature with horse's legs and ears but the face of a poor-spirited man (B20 Beast-man). Gruagach is obliged to carry Maid-Alone to the King's Castle because she catches him at work (C300 Looking tabu). The Old Woman gives Maid-Alone the magic Crow-feather Cloak. Following instructions from the Woman of a Thousand Years, Maid-Alone plucks a twig in each of the Three Woods through which they pass. Each twig broken off becomes a splendid dress with matching veil and shoes (F811.1 Trees of extraordinary materials). The first is a glittering dress of bronze, the second, silver, the third, gold (Type 510B The Dress of Gold, of Silver, and of Stars). Gruagach tells Maid-Alone that he will be beaten on his way back through the woods for each time she breaks off a twig (C513 Tabu: breaking twig). Maid-Alone hides her three dresses in the hollow of a tree outside the King's Castle. She goes in "the least grand way" as she has been instructed by her fairy godmother and asks for work. She becomes the Goose girl (K1816.5 Type 533. The Speaking Horsehead).

During all this time the stepmother and stepsisters have been absent. At this point, they re-enter the story. The stepmother and stepsisters alight from their coach on the highway and wait for the King's son to notice them as he rides past. He asks each daughter to bring him a drink of

water from a nearby well. Each returns with water in cupped palms, but the water flows away before the prince can drink. Maid-Alone succeeds in bringing water to the King's son. The King's son rudely asks Maid-Alone to give water to his hound dog. Maid-Alone is recognized but not acknowledged by her stepmother and stepsisters.

The King's son is to choose a wife and all the maidens in the land gather at the Castle. Maid-Alone's stepmother is the house dame and looks afer all the young women (shades of the Miss America extravaganza!). The next day Maid-Alone wears her dress of bronze in front of the geese and they refuse to feed. The Muime (ancient foster mother of the King's son) overhears the geese talking about the beautiful maiden (H151.12, Geese tell of beauty of their mistress and bring about recognition, Type 533) and tells the King's son. He goes in search of her but finds only the goose girl. This happens twice more—when Maid-Alone wears the dress of silver, and again when she wears the dress of gold. Each time the geese are too excited to feed. Maid-Alone is scolded by her stepmother for allowing the geese to get thin and is assigned the task of keeping the hearth clear of ashes instead of feeding the geese. The King's son refuses to search further. At the ball he dances with the two stepsisters and admires their beauty. He is about to ask the fairest maiden at the ball to distribute citrons and pomegranates among the guests (similar to the Perrault version). Will it be Berry-bright or Buttercup?

At that moment Maid-Alone appears in her finery, and the riddling begins (H530, Riddles). King's Son: "Where have you come from, bright damsel?" Maid-Alone: "From Lost-ember Moor"..."From where a dog's tongue lapped water from my hands." (See the Scandanavian version, "Kari Woodenskirt".) She refuses to dance with the King's son until he recognizes her. Pitch is put on the stairs and the Matchless Maiden (Maid-Alone) is forced to leave her gold slipper as she flees (J1146.1 Detection by pitch-trap). In the slipper test (H36.1) the stepmother gives her daughters a salve to rub on their feet to shrink the toe and heel, but the trick doesn't work.

The King asks that the wisest woman come to the Castle—"And that he might know she was the wisest she was to come, not naked but with no clothes on (H1054 Task: coming neither naked nor clad), not fed and yet not fasting, (H1063 Task: coming neither hungry nor satiated), in no one's company and yet not alone" (H1061 Task: coming neither with nor without a companion) (Type 875, The Clever Peasant Girl). The Matchless Maiden meets the bride test. The King's son recognizes her at last, but Maid-Alone goes away. The King's son searches in vain for a year. Eventually, two starlings (B450) lead him to a "small black house deep-sunken in the ground" where he finds the Old Woman in the Cloak of Crow-feathers. He tells her all he has done in contrition, and she takes him to her garden where he finds Maid-Alone. All ends happily with the marriage of the King's son and Maid-Alone.

These two literary works are as unalike as two variants of the folktale, for instance, the Grimm version and the Chinese version. Farjeon's *Cinderella* is light and airy, full of images carried over from the stage production. Such theatrical magic is evocative of a modern musical comedy or Baryshnikov's ballet production of *Cinderella*. Farjeon's prose is sparkling, her wit at its best in the scenes where the stepmother teaches her daughters court manners and the herald announces the guests at the ball.

Farjeon's version is delightful, amusing, pleasing, but Colum's version, richer in the use of folkloristic sources, is inwardly more satisfying. Colum, one of the leaders in the Irish Literary Renaissance of the early twentieth century, had a lifelong interest in folklore. He was very much influenced by the traditional folktales he heard in childhood. In *The Girl Who Sat in the Ashes* Colum fuses folkloristic elements from various versions of the "Cinderella" tale into a cohesive whole. His version leaves the reader mystified and hints at a deeper meaning beneath the surface of the plot.

Colum portrays the maturation of the heroine, Maid-Alone, as she successfully meets each test. Farjeon's Ella never seems to acquire a sense of self. The story's ending seems mere wish-fulfillment rather than a recognition of the heroine's rightful rank. Though Farjeon's use of the daydream, and her philosophy of the oneness of dream and reality, seem to express a psychological truth in such stories as "The Mill of Dreams" and "Elsie Piddock," the heroine's daydreaming in this tale seems nothing more than wishful thinking. Was this "soft-heartedness" due to the mellowing often associated with aging? Or did it have to do with the atmosphere in which the story was written? The play was written during World War II at the request of Robert Donat. According to Farjeon herself, Donat asked Eleanor and her younger brother Herbert (Bertie) "to rewrite a fairy tale as a really lovely show for children." The novel was written when Farjeon was seventy-four. It was based on the earlier collaboration with Bertie who died during the war and on their joint effort to produce something magical for children during a bleak period in English history. Her age, memories of her deceased brother, and the war years may account for its sentimental ring.

This discussion shows the influence of folkloristic sources on the direction of a literary work; but it also implies how an author's personal vision may influence his or her choice, and use, of folkloristic sources in a literary retelling.

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Joseph Campbell on the Second Mesa: Structure and Meaning in *Arrow to the Sun*

by Jon C. Stott

Although it may be linked to a tale type widely distributed in North America, every native tale has its own integrity. As a product of the culture in which it is told, it is part of that culture's holistic view of reality; and that view of reality is rooted in the geographical location of the specific people. As Vine Deloria, Jr. has suggested in *God is Red*, his study of native religions, the beliefs of native peoples were closely tied to the places in which they lived: "Holy Places were well-known in what have been classified as primitive religions. The vast majority of Indian tribal religions have a centre at a particular place, be it river, mountain, plateau, valley, or other natural feature" (81). This is particularly true of the Pueblo peoples; their religious beliefs and the myths that embody them relate closely to the specific features of the Southwest in which they have lived for centuries.

The non-native writer who wishes to adapt native legends for children is faced with a difficult problem. He must maintain the delicate balance between making his version faithful to the religious basis of the culture, with its close relationship to the place in which it evolved, and at the same time making it accessible to readers for whom this culture is in all likelihood totally foreign. Gerald McDermott's *Arrow to the Sun*, one of the best and best-known modern adaptations of a native legend, represents an interesting solution to this problem. Although McDermott is scrupulously accurate in his presentation of details of Pueblo culture, the overall structure and meaning of his tale have been influenced by the studies of Joseph Campbell in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces.*

In *Arrow to the Sun*, McDermott adapts Pueblo iconography to invest his story with implicit meanings which specifically link it to the cultural and religious beliefs of these people. Pueblo religion reflects the basic relationship between the people and their environment. An agricultural people whose primary crop was corn, they depended on the correct mixtures of sun and rain to grow crops in the arid landscape. However, like most primal peoples, the Pueblo did not approach the physical environment in a solely empirical, scientific manner. Living in a cosmos in which the human, non-human, and supernatural were closely interrelated, they believed that a successful harvest depended to a great extent on their achievement of a right relationship with those powers who controlled the rains and the growth of the corn. The Kachina dances, which extend from winter to the time of harvest, were major ritual observances designed to assist in the development of the corn.

Arrow to the Sun reflects this spiritual orientation in many ways. Generally, the boy, whose logo is a stylized cross-section of an ear of corn, lives in an arid land to which he brings life by supplying the rainbow, symbol of sun and rain. On nearly every page, the visual elements reflect the cultural processes by which he succeeds. The designs on the end-papers approximate the stylized rain clouds found throughout Pueblo design; the orange colors parallel the dry land; and not only the logo, but also the boy's hair style (which develops in the story) emphasize the centrality of corn; and finally the rainbow on which he dances signals the arrival of rain and therefore life for the people.

Moreover, the manner in which the boy proves himself worthy of bringing the power of the sun to the people is deeply rooted in elements of Pueblo belief. McDermott has done his research thoroughly and has implicitly embedded it within his presentation of the tests the hero undergoes on the sun. It is appropriate that the boy enter four kivas, for the kivas, chambers entered through a hole in the roof, were sacred places where, among other things, Pueblo youths were initiated into the mysteries of the spiritual lives of the people. What happens in the story's kivas is at once important to the specific quest of the boy and generally to the religious life of the people. The boy must successively enter kivas containing lions (cougars), serpents (rattlesnakes), bees, and lightning. In terms of the culture, his four tests involve steps necessary to help the corn grow. Mountain lions symbolize war societies and, in taming the lions of the first kiva, the boy is establishing the peace necessary for agriculture. Rattlesnakes were not only valuable pest controllers, attacking the rats who ate stored corn, they were also important in rainmaking ceremonies. After being used in ritual dances, they were released at the edges of the villages so that they could return to the hills, there to report to the rain spirits the reverences accorded them by the people. In turning the snakes into a circle, symbol of unity and harmony, the boy is extending to them the necessary reverence. By forcing the bees to order themselves into a functioning hive, he is establishing the organization that is necessary if the processes of pollination is to occur. Finally, by submitting himself to the power of lightning, so frequently seen above the hills beyond the villages, he is able to achieve new power and bring sun and rain to the people.

Analyzing the story in the light of Pueblo culture, we see that the boy is much more than a rejected child who achieves peer group recognition. In his quest, he establishes his identity as the Son of God, and to do that, he has had to undergo tests that fulfill the prime responsibility of a God, social responsibility and leadership. In the case of Pueblo culture, this involved engaging in those spiritual activities necessary for the